

THE WASHINGTON POST
12 November 1975

George F. Will

George Bush: Political Ambitions...

When nominated to be Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, George Bush said he did not think that being Director would forever prevent him from seeking political office. Obviously he hopes it will not, and his hope was stroked by President Ford's declaration that Bush is not excluded from consideration as his 1976 running mate.

Bush may not have to worry about a CIA attachment becoming a political handicap. The Senate may refuse to confirm him.

Like some other ex-Congressmen (he served two terms), Bush is one of Mr. Ford's guys, which is fine. But at the CIA he would be the wrong kind of guy at the wrong place at the worst possible time.

The CIA is, under a cloud of dark suspicion based on proven misdeeds. The suspicion is that the CIA is a threat to civil liberties, and perhaps to tranquillity, because it is insubordinate or otherwise immune to proper control.

But lack of control over the CIA is no longer the gravest problem. Congress, awakened from its long sleep, is alert to its oversight duties. And the executive branch, having been reminded of the law, can keep the CIA operating this side of criminality.

Today the most pressing problem is not to prevent the CIA from doing what is forbidden. Rather, the problem is to see that it does what it is supposed to do, which is gather and report accurate information.

But gathering and reporting are different operations. And it is possible to imagine situations in which the CIA would be pressured to suppress inconvenient information, or to report things convenient to the political purposes of an administration.

Imagine an administration looking to the next election and determined to celebrate detente as its finest achievement. Imagine that the administration is excessively anxious to achieve another strategic arms agreement with the Soviet Union.

Suppose the administration triumphantly signed an agreement limiting the number of strategic vehicles—missiles and bombers—on each side. Critics might say the limit is a false ceiling. Critics might charge that the limit is as high as the Soviet Union can or wants to go during the term of the agreement. Therefore, the agreement is an empty exercise, a limit that does not limit. (That is what Senator Henry Jackson said about the 2,400-vehicle limit agreed to at Vladivostok.)

Then the administration would appreciate a CIA report arguing that the



Soviet Union has the ability to surpass the limit in the near future, and would do so if there were no agreement.

Or suppose the administration wanted an intelligence report minimizing this or that verification problem—say, the difficulty of verifying Soviet compliance with range limits on cruise missiles.

Or suppose the administration could get a CIA report supporting the hitherto unsupported Soviet contention that the Soviet Backfire bomber—which can deliver nuclear weapons over intercontinental distances—nevertheless lacks the strategic significance, and should not count against the Soviet total of 2,400 strategic vehicles permitted by the Vladivostok agreement. Such a CIA report would concede a Soviet point without seeming to be a concession, and could grease the skids for a pre-election agreement.

Recent events have made it wise to worry about the possibility that the CIA will become compliant to political pressures in reporting intelligence information, especially information that might tarnish the image of detente.

Defense Secretary Schlesinger, an apolitical man, was the foremost critic within the administration of Secretary Kissinger's policy in negotiating with the Soviet Union—sometimes called "the policy of preemptive concession." Mr. Ford wants to replace Schlesinger with Donald Rumsfeld, another vice presidential aspirant. Thus it is all the more imperative that the CIA be run by a man not susceptible to political considerations or pressures.

The problem with Bush is less that he has a political past than that he so obviously and avidly wants to have a political future.

As chairman of the Republican National Committee during Watergate Bush was very considerate about the man who appointed him. In spite of all the available evidence, he never expressed independent judgments inconvenient to Richard Nixon.

It might be rash to expect Bush to display at the CIA a capacity for politically inconvenient independence in judging intelligence. That is why the Senate may ask Mr. Ford for another nominee.